532 of the evil eye. Another possible explanation is that centuries ago this symbolism was adopted from Armenian paintings; which is not surprising in view of early, though interrupted contacts between Byzantine and Coptic church art, and later on even Persian and Indian contacts (footnote 101). The amazing realism of natural objects may possibly be of ancient origin, and has survived the emphasis on highly formalized composition enforced by the church.

Scenes depicting everyday life ("abore"), or the famous motif showing the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon (mentioned in the Bible), are also painted on gourds, the useful utensil with the smooth surface. But only the well-to-do or noble families can afford this; (also the tourist). Sometimes the secular motifs show figures of famous military warlords and provincial dynastic heads of the past; and simple, incised geometric figures pleasing to the traditional feudal lord whose appreciation of art wanted direct, simple, and realistic portrayal.

4. Amhara Ideas about Nature and Mankind.

887 While his material culture is limited, speculation about the
812 structure, function, and most of all meaning, of the non-material world ranges unfettered in the Amhara culture pattern. Moreover, it is freely expressed, evidencing deep thought, but primarily a wonderment. Often there is a sensitivity that resembles Weltschmerz. This wondering out loud affects most Amhara men when they reach the "shemagalye" (elder) stage, and is one of the most frequently and intensely expressed subjects of their conversation; while at younger ages they are too

Footnote 101 - Nollet, G.: Note (in) Aethiopica, Vol. 3 pp. 191-2 New York, 1935.

887 preoccupied with the immediate demands of life. The culture pattern
812 encourages the shenagalye to give much time and effort to this wonderment, for it belongs to his prime role and social duty at this stage: the accumulation of wisdom. The church does not interfere with this wonderment and its expression, partly because it has not bothered to establish dogma on many subjects.

A. The Natural Universe.

821 In many ways the Amhara concept of the universe resembles that of
[[71]] early medieval Europe, plus understandable similarities to the Middle East and Africa. Some conceptualizations are elaborations from the Biblical universe, readily recognizable because almost always the Geez language is used to express them. Other conceptualizations are animistic, and usually employ Cushitic terminology.

The universe is regarded as a Ptolemaic system, with the earth as the fixed center around which the sun turns. A distinction is made between the physical world, called simply "arät mäzän" (lit. the 4 corners); and the world populated by all creatures, "alam" (lit. world, in the Geez language). The persistence of this traditional view of a flat earth is so great that even Amhara schoolteachers in the modern elementary schools in the provinces, who are required to teach a spherical earth, privately admit that they don't believe it themselves!

Heavenly bodies and metereological phenomena are interpreted as directly related to human events. Venus is called "astärbeshäsh" or "astäryo", (lit. the one who gives hunger and then flees), because the planet appears in the very brief dusk, when the heat of the day is over and one gets hungry. Because Venus is "fleeing and inconstant like a woman", she is given the feminine gender.

821 Considerable attention is given to the moon ("chäräqa"), for it
243 is believed to cause the ripening of the grain after the sun has

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

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157

"qaleb" - one who shines with intelligence;

"qalbam" - Person full of reason, discretion, intellectual beauty.

812 It is clear from the last two personalities that a distinction is made between the merely clever (e.g. in material things) and the wise person. Wisdom is stressed in numerous proverbs:

539 "A king who has no wise councillor,
not one year will he reign".

Many Amhara desirous of reputation, emulate the Biblical wisdom of King Solomon, a wise judge whom "no one could fool". Anecdotes of this type of wisdom are told far and wide, of kings and of rulers of provinces. Even at present, some of these anecdotes are told of rulers still living, including of Emperor Haile Selassie. The following two anecdotes, which may well be factual, are told in Gondar about Ras Imru, who ruled as governor-general of Begemdir province just after the liberation from Italian occupation, when banditry was a major problem:

539 812 1. Two bandits accused of robbery-murder were placed in separate confinement. They had refused to confess, and the time of the murder could not be ascertained. One bandit was taken to the place of the crime, on orders of Ras Imru, and told that his partner had confessed; then, that the time of the crime had been such-and-such. Eager to argue against such an error, the bandit momentarily overlooked the fact that by correcting the time element he was giving himself away. Whereupon both were convicted and hanged.

2. One day, while riding through the market, Ras Imru was halted when a woman threw herself before his horse, shouting "abyet", the traditional appeal of the oppressed. She accused one of Ras Imru's soldiers of having consumed a large pitcher of milk she had for sale, without payment. The soldier denied it, and there were no witnesses

812 willing to testify against him. Ras Imru ordered that he be made to [539] vomit, and on the basis of this evidence convicted him on the spot.

While the clever arguer in court, who is acclaimed, may be merely "clever", the truly wise man is conceived as one whose words are few but weighty:

[539] "Man, by what can he be valued?
by his speech can he be valued".

Hence, in the games of growing children, the hazing pattern is gradually replaced by verbal contests, and the winner or "better man" is not necessarily the physically stronger but he who can out-insult and out-argue the other.

However, individualistic non-conformity in ordinary persons is criticized, and regarded as rendering such persons shiftless, unstable and impermanent.

Finally, different regions of Amhara-populated areas are believed to be specialized in specific types of personalities; e.g. the däbtära scribes of Entoto, where the capital of Addis Ababa is located now, have long had the reputation of special cleverness, speaking in riddles which make understanding painful, when they deign to converse at all with ordinary Amhara commoners:

[539] "The wise men of Entoto,
talk just once a year,
(and then) always (bitingly) bitter".

[770] Special skill of hand or mind is generally believed, for good or ill, to come from the world and functions of the spirits.

X794 T76 From this complex array of the plaguing - but often also protective- spirit world, it becomes clear that there is a great deal of significance in the zar cult beyond mere healing of mental ailments; even beyond the organizing of patients into groups of devotees - a kind of group therapy with religious overtones. There is an extension of the acquired "protection" so that some zars become not only protective spirits of individuals, but patron saints of certain social groups in Amhara society, e.g. some specialize in the rich and noble, some in the poor or low-class; some in hunters and warriors; etc. But although religious affiliations are usually identified sharply, there is considerable crossing of the lines in the spirit world so that Coptic Christian spirits may have Muslim names, and even practice religious intermarriage. Another important contribution made by the zar cult is that it orders nature, explains nature to the Amhara mind, yet allows enough flexibility (e.g. in regional variations, and the continuously increasing and decreasing power of individual zars) to admit new information, new revelations, to be fitted into the traditional construct. For example, in the 1930's the dominant zar spirit in Gondar was Sayfu Changar (ascertained by a French expedition); in 1953/1954 it was Aweliya. Since zar spirits can have successful and unsuccessful careers, so can humans; hence, new ideas, even modern ones, can be fitted into the spiritual world.

[812]

But the major character of the "zar" complex is that of a healing cult.

X794 T56 T96 c. <u>The Annual Convention ("amat bal") of the"Zar" Doctors; Voluntary Possession in the "Zar"Cult.</u>

On the 23rd night of the month of Yakatit, the day before the beginning of the Coptic Christian lent, the "zar" doctors of Gondar hold

829 pattern continues in full force even at present. As a result, the high official is as hesitant about delegating authority downward (which might build up a potential rival), as the inferior in the hierarchy fears to accept delegated authority (lest the superior repent of his grant and suspect rebellion). In consequence, daily problems, even routine ones, are regularly referred for decision to the superior in the hierarchy of government.

812 The authoritarian "literalness" which characterizes so many Amhara attitudes may at least in part be the effect of religious fundamentalism. Until recently, the "Fetha Nägast" criminal and [681] civil code was literally enforced, including the cutting off of hands for theft and of feet for rebellion. Biblical passages are interpreted literally, by the priests. In monasteries, the monks exclude the presence of even female animals such as cows.

[779] The church, sacerdotal in its concepts and rituals, does not feel that it owes an explanation to anyone; and "literalness" has remained unchallenged (except during the relatively brief Portuguese episode). In the Amhara view, there is a direct and unilateral connection between cause and effect, and paradoxes that result from such oversimplifications are ignored: e.g. the tallest obelisk at Aksum, which has fallen and broken into several large pieces, is claimed to have been "pushed" over by the Falasha Queen Judith, despite the fact that another, almost as tall, still stands nearby. [682] Homicide, especially if accidental, is blamed on the "zanyen" spirits who pushed the murderer's hand.

647 Literal obedience dominates the governmental administration, for no subordinate would arrogate to himself the privilege of "interpret" the spirit of the law handed down by the official of superior status.